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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000263

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SUNNIS DIVIDED IN REACTION TO CANDIDATE
DISQUALIFICATIONS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 0226
[B](#). BAGHDAD 0222
[C](#). BAGHDAD 0184
[D](#). 09 BAGHDAD 2907

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Classified By: Acting DCM Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#). (C) SUMMARY: The reaction among Iraq's Sunni community to the electoral disqualification of hardliner MP Saleh al-Mutlaq and other Sunni politicians has been varied, ranging from condemnation to acquiescence to silent approval. Mutlaq's partners in the Iraqiyya coalition have made a show of coming to his aid, but privately some of his cohorts may be none too sad if he is ultimately excluded from the ballot. The Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), on the defensive after losing its once dominant role in Sunni politics, might have discreetly helped to ban Mutlaq and other rivals in an effort to weaken and siphon off votes from Iraqiyya. Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha of the Iraqi Awakening Council, a member of the Coalition of Iraqi Unity, which is competing with Iraqiyya for the same pool of Sunni secular-nationalist voters, has clarified that although he is concerned with the disqualification of candidates, he does not intend to boycott the elections. END SUMMARY.

SUSPECT ALLIES

[2](#). (C) While the opaque decision of the Accountability and Justice Commission (AJC) to disqualify Mutlaq and other Sunni candidates from the March 2010 elections has elicited sharp reactions from some quarters of Iraq's Sunni community, it has drawn only half-hearted objections or even silent approval in others. Some of Mutlaq's partners within the Iraqiyya coalition, wary of appearing weak and afraid of alienating the embattled MP's considerable support base among Iraq's hardline secular Sunni voters, have spoken out strongly in his defense. (Note: According to the latest NDI poll, 7% of Iraqis said they would vote for Mutlaq's Iraqi Front for National Dialogue (IFND) party -- the highest percentage total for any single Sunni-led political party. This still falls well short, however, of the 18% affirmative response for the Iraqi National List, the cross-sectarian party within the Iraqiyya umbrella headed by Mutlaq's coalition partner Ayad Allawi. End Note.) Allawi has walked back somewhat from his threat of an election boycott (ref A), but remains highly critical of the non-transparent disqualification process. Deputy PM Issawi, another prominent Iraqiyya figure, is working behind the scenes to try to salvage Mutlaq's political future (ref A).

[3](#). (C) There is some speculation that despite what Allawi and other Iraqiyya politicians may do in public or say to us privately, they may secretly welcome the departure of Mutlaq and the IFND from the political scene, as this would mean one less person/party with whom to share Iraqiyya's post-election spoils. The banning of the IFND, which has taken a rather

uncompromising stance on Arab-Kurd issues, could theoretically also make it easier for Allawi to secure KRG President Barzani's support for the position of prime minister if Iraqiyya makes a very strong electoral showing.

IIP: A WILLING AJC ACCOMPLICE?

14. (C) Formerly the dominant Sunni voice in Iraq's Council of Representatives (COR), the new Tawafuq coalition centered around the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), faces a rather bleak post-election future after the departure of some of its most prominent figures, including DPM Issawi and Vice President Hashimi (ref D). Once controlling 44 seats in the current COR, the most recent NDI poll gives Tawafuq 6% support among the Iraqi electorate -- far below the 29% of respondents who voiced support for Iraqiyya. Aware of its decline and the limited support for Iraqiyya. Aware of its decline and the limits of its popular appeal among secularists due to its religious identity, the IIP has strong motivation to weaken rival Sunni-majority parties such as Iraqiyya in an effort to pick up votes. (Note: As reported ref B, 72 Iraqiyya candidates were on the AJC disqualification list, versus 20 low-profile names from Tawafuq. End Note.) In one display of intra-Sunni tensions, the head of the Salah ad-Din (SAD) provincial council, a Sunni affiliated with Allawi's Iraqi National List, led a successful effort to remove the IIP governor of SAD from office in favor of a non-IIP politician.

The IIP has since maneuvered to prevent the governor-elect from officially taking office (ref C).

15. (C) There is evidence to suggest that the IIP, which has remained relatively quiet during the current de-Ba'athification crisis, may have willingly let itself be used to keep Mutlaq and other candidates off election ballots. The IIP's representative on the Independent High

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Electoral Commission (IHEC) Board, Sa'ad Kareem al-Rawi, has apparently accepted most of the AJC's determinations and, like the rest of the Board, posed no roadblocks to the disqualification process. (Note: Several IHEC commissioners separately told us they were extremely concerned with being labeled pro-Ba'athist. End Note.) In the COR, Speaker Iyad al-Samarra'ie (IIP) failed to line up behind a proposed political solution that would have deferred candidate disqualification until after the elections to allow for a transparent vetting process. Despite entreaties from UNAMI, the Embassy and USF-I, he has abjured from any apparent constructive role in the matter. IIP MP Rasheed al-Azzawi, the Sunni member of the COR's ad-hoc three-person committee tasked with reviewing names on the AJC lists, has done little to aid banned Iraqiyya candidates. After initially expressing concern with his committee's work, Azzawi recently defended AJC disqualification efforts to local media.

MEANWHILE, OUT IN ANBAR. . .

16. (C) The cross-sectarian, but Sunni-majority Coalition for Iraqi Unity (CIU), led by Minister of Interior Bolani, also appears to have been a main target for the AJC, with 67 of its 514 candidates barred from the elections (ref B). However, none of those disqualified has the political profile or strength of Mutlaq, which may account for why the CIU has been subdued in protesting the AJC's actions. That appeared to change on January 30 when, to the surprise of some observers, Anbar tribal leader Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, the Sunni headliner in the CIU, was reported in the media to be considering calling for a boycott due to the AJC candidate "blacklist." Abu Risha later clarified in a radio interview, however, that he and his party would participate in the election, although he added that the exclusion of candidates by the AJC in an unfair process would harm the Iraqi political process. (Note: PRT Anbar will continue to firmly relay our message cautioning against talk of a boycott to

relevant Anbar contacts. End Note.)

17. (C) COMMENT: Chalabi's strategy of strengthening the Iraqi National Alliance's (INA) candidates by eliminating the allegedly Ba'athist competitors may have had the added benefit of sowing discord among Sunnis in general. On the other hand, we also saw the INA initially acting in apparent defense of its potential post-election ally, Allawi's Iraqiyya, by seeking a political solution to the de-Ba'athification crisis. Moreover, we also saw, albeit out of very parochial motives, PM Maliki's State of Law Alliance and Tawafuq behaving nearly identically in at least assenting to, if not actually advocating for, the Ba'athist purge. This de-Ba'athification drive may be the first tangible evidence of cross-sectarian cooperation taking place, if only in the interest of advancing narrow party interests. END COMMENT.
HILL